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ON PAGE 1

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Action Promised on Security Leaks

Administration Thinks That Criminal Violations Occurred, Two Officials Say

By JACK NELSON, Times Washington Bureau Chief

WASHINGTON—The Reagan Administration believes that criminal violations have occurred in some leaks of national security information to the press and it plans to take "appropriate action," two Administration officials have told The Times.

The officials refused to identify any such cases, but one said, "There have been four or five articles that have caused trouble, and you just can't run a government that way."

The officials, both involved in national security matters, were interviewed with the understanding that they would not be identified.

They refused to say whether the sources of the leaks have been identified or what they mean by "appropriate action." In 1981, one official said, two or three government employees resigned after they "were given the opportunity to leave government service" after they were identified as the source of leaks.

Two Instances Cited

One official singled out two recent incidents that he said were particularly damaging to national security: a Time magazine report on the sale of fighter planes to Taiwan and newspaper reports on the arrival of a Soviet armaments shipment in Havana, Cuba.

In the first case, he said, John Holdridge, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, had just arrived in Peking when Time, in its Jan. 12 issue, reported that the Administration had decided against selling advanced F5-G aircraft to Taiwan, but would continue selling it a less advanced plane, the F5-E. Instead of receiving word of the decision from official sources, the People's Republic of China learned of it through a news service quoting the magazine account.

"The People's Republic of China told Holdridge to go back home, they wouldn't do business that way," the official said. "In light of their anger, we had to do a lot of backpedaling just to get our talks back on schedule."

Shipment Disappeared

In the second incident, the official said, the United States had a Soviet armaments shipment in Havana under surveillance, but the shipment suddenly disappeared after newspapers disclosed its existence.

Meanwhile, a sharp debate has broken out within the Administration over proposed regulations for implementing the President's recent directive to crack down on national security leaks.

On the other side are press officers of the departments who have unanimously opposed rigid regulations and have urged that the Administration do nothing that would unduly restrict officials' contacts with the news media.

William P. Clark, the President's new assistant for national security—who is expected to approve and announce the implementing regulations this week—is known to be concerned about reports that the issuance of the presidential directive Jan. 12 has already disrupted the flow of normal contact between the press and foreign affairs officers.

Immediately after the directive was issued, many State and Defense department desk officers who routinely deal with reporters began canceling appointments they had scheduled with the media.

Clark is known to believe that some of the measures proposed by intelligence officers are too harsh and reportedly is seeking a middle ground that would satisfy the interests of national security but would not hobble the press in its normal pursuit of stories involving national security.

Clark has scheduled a meeting for today with Barrie Dunsmore of ABC-TV, president of the State Department Correspondents Assn., to discuss the President's directive. Dunsmore had written Clark a letter criticizing the directive and declaring that it has resulted in government officials canceling appointments with reporters.

A press officer who has been involved in the negotiations over the wording of the document said: "Everything hinges now on how the implementation regulations are worded. If they are worded in such a way that it scares the hell out of the desk officers, the way the President's directive did, it will cut off contacts and the flow of information."